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JOURNAL OF COMIC FANDOM

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"...beholden to none."

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Into the fray...

If there was ever a season to ponder why anyone would work in the comics field, this is it. With a glut of new material hitting the stands along with prices that are soaring, one doesn't have to think too hard about why so many titles are gonna go south "faster then a speeding bullet". So then, why, do you ask, should there be one more entrant into the already crowded fray? -Hey...why not?

I originally offered the Reactor story to another magazine covering comics almost a year ago when the Donna concept was so new it would've seemed like science fiction. The editors were a couple of staff guys who regularly covered trading cards and sports material. The reaction to a feature on computer-aided comics was less then positive no matter how I cut it. Ditto for a piece on Alex Ross; the actual quote was something like, "let's wait 'til he's published", (no matter that he had already done several series; he wasn't this week's boy). Editors are usually the last to ever catch the buzz and when they do, they don't create the hoopla, they edit it.

Now add the concept of reader-participation via modem (or conventional snail-mail) and editors usually snicker and back away. Well, you have some degree of respect here, so let your fingers do the talking: e-mail me via AOL or Prodigy and let's get busy asking REAL questions. Mike Saenz's encounter with a real on-line question reshaped the whole intended direction of our interview; you can do the same thing if you want to, and judging from the handful of e-mail already received WITHOUT the benefit of a printed book, you *really* want to.

For the technically-minded, this is produced on a Mac LC with 10 megs of RAM and only 40 megs of hard-disk space, a

Continued on page 2

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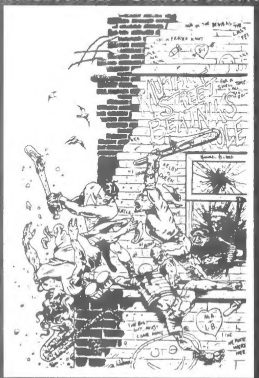

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Fray

Continued from page 1

Microtek ScanMaker II XE, 300 dpi laserprinter, Quark, Photoshop and lots of floppies. This ain't Wizard, people, it's real down-in-the-working-trenches grunge fandom gone cyber. Right now, you are on the inside looking out.

This little stapled pile of pulp also isn't meant to compete with CBG or the Journal. They really are the bibles of the industry and I read them both, albeit at around $36 each annually . We don't cover the news like CBG and never intended to and never will. We're never going to purposely run afoul of Gary Groth; we respect his work and will support it forever because, love it or hate it, it is excellent. But we're here on the inside looking around and admiring the pain-staking process of creating, whether it's a painted graphic novel or mini-book, whether it is DC or its privately published it is creativity that drives the person and to really encounter it -on any level- is inspiring.

Do you remember the first time you ever asked "what it was like to be an artist"? Well, pilgrim, you're about to find out. We'll try to keep it as interesting as the people who dominate this strange, misunderstood world.

Consider this your personal invitation to the party and as you'll see, there's a lot more to these remarkable people then that which appears on paper...

Mark

Mad Marcus

Special thanks to Malibu, Norm D, Joe Allen, Alex Ross, Laurie B, Meg and Steve, America Online, Mike Saenz (for guidance), Joe and Jimmy, Mary B (for transcribing), Chrystal, N & F Type. You helped it to happen!

Disclaimer: all information contained in this issue is believed to be accurate and true. The views of the featured artists and writers are their own and may differ from those of the editor (aka: I turn on the tape and let 'er rip). If ya don't like what they're saying, try treating 'em nicer next time...

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Illustrated by Gordon Purcell & Terry Pallot

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DONNA MATRIX STRUTS HER STUFF

Defying The Mainstream With Reactor's Innovative New Line Of Digital Comics: An Interview With Mike Saenz and Norm Dwyer

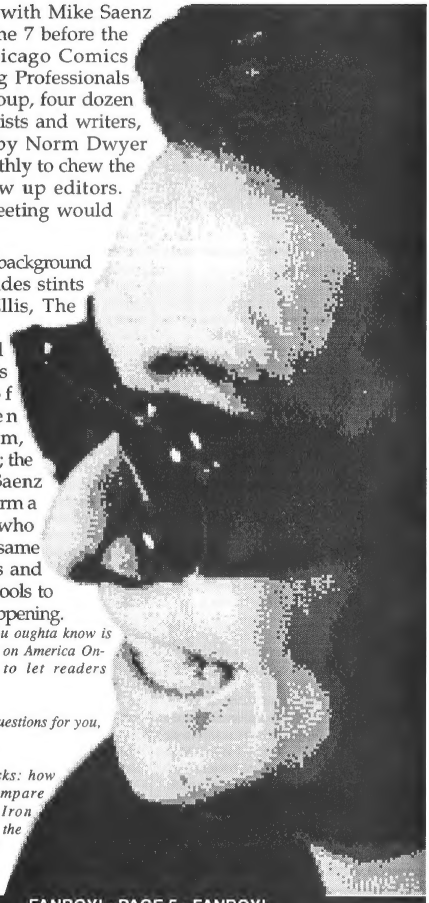
Mike Saenz is, for better or worse, the harbinger of high-technology toys as well as a visionary behind what our social libidos interpret as fun. Mike knows his toys and in that knowledge helps to define the toystore of his generation.

The rules and the tools of comics are changing, albeit slowly and begrudgingly, and as they are dragged kicking and screaming into the new, present-day world of computer-aided design, they inevitably have to settle in somewhere behind Saenz who dominates this new sandbox. It's as if the old playground was abandoned and in the absence of others, Saenz reconfigured all of the monkeybars, knowing that in time, they'd be back and if they want to play there again it would be on his terms, not theirs.

Heralding the 1993 launch of Digital Comics, Saenz and his crew of merry pranksters at Reactor are reteaching the industry that the public will determine who's cool and who's not, with Reactor being the top-dog that contenders will have to face.

We caught up with Mike Saenz on Tuesday, June 7 before the rest of the Chicago Comics and Cartooning Professionals arrived. The group, four dozen or so comic artists and writers, was founded by Norm Dwyer and meets monthly to chew the fat and to chew up editors. This night's meeting would be at Reactor.

Norm Dwyer's background in comics includes stints doing Libby Ellis, The Twilight Zone, Star Trek as well as a collector's closetful of others. When Mike met Norm, the stage was set; the die was cast. Saenz had found in Norm a kindred spirit who envisioned the same new landscapes and knew the right tools to make it begin happening.



One of the things you oughta know is that I'm posting this on America Online and Prodigy to let readers interact.

Right...

...and I have a few questions for you, if that's ok.

Go ahead, man...

Ok: Alan Baltis asks: how would you compare Reactor's work to Iron Helix,or Hell Cab or the Journeyman Project?

Our cd-rom work?

Yes.

That's the question?

Yeah...

(long pause and a burst of laughter)

You can be honest

Ok, I'm going to be brutally honest. You got your recorder going?

Yes

Ok: Lets take em one at a time. Let's start with Hell Cab. I came up with an idea years ago that I called TXI and Pepe (Moreno) knew a lot about it and a few other mutual associates that he had through me knew about it. Now that was when I wanted to start this company I wanted to call Eon, which failed, because the people I started with took seed capital and spent it before I even arrived on the scene...and I was the chairman (laughs). So that was pretty bad, it was technically a case of embezzlement, but instead I just chose to walk and start Reactor.

What year was that?

That was '87.

That wasn't that long ago; everything is moving so fast for you.

Yeah, well I was really in there before a lot of people were involved, you know? But it was '87 and TXI was this concept that I had for a futuristic city-New York and this flying cab, and Pepe Moreno was working with me as an assistant on the Iron Man Book. And even though he is a comic book artist who's well reputed throughout Europe and does work in his own right. He really wanted to do computer graphics and he came to me repeatedly over a two year period to get as much information as he could about doing computer comic books.

So was he soaking you?

I was very open with my information, as I always have been in the past. What he really needed to know was only something he could learn by being on the job. I got to the point with him that, that was all that was remaining. And he really needed to get to that level -he felt- and so I put it to him, "If you really want to learn how to do computer comic books you need to work on one, so either do one or do nothing because I can't help you. "I've given you all the information and leads and data you need". He didn't feel confident enough, he didn't feel as though he knew enough so I made him this proposal which was ok, fine...if you work with me on my Iron Man book as an assistant, you will learn everything that you will need to know about making comic books with computers and beyond...which was, in my thinking at that time, beyond computer comic books was cd-rom. I felt that was a logical progression from the work that I was doing with computers and comic books. A lot of other people don't necessarily see a logical progression from computer comic books to cd-rom and that's fine, that's them. That was my view on it and I really didn't need an assistant but I took him anyway. And I tried to employ him the best I could on the project and employ his talent and gave him as much information as he could take...

...and he took it.

-He took it. Now, as far as Journeyman goes and Iron Helix and those other products, let me just say that with Iron Helix I spoke to Drew Hoffman recently who I think is a really good guy and he knows his stuff and he put it this way: he said that if there's anyone in this industry who is telling you that they're not imitating Warlock they're lying.

I think the same thing; they're all coming in line right behind it.

...and that's fine, I am all for it. What I really have to explain here is that I am all for as many people as possible doing quality cd-rom entertainment for Macintosh and Pc and home platforms. I am all for people doing a good job, though, and I haven't seen much of that. I see a lot of the dregs of the multimedia industry doing a slapped-together, haphazard job, so I'm not happy when I see a low-quality product.

You've hit a standard that people in the industry will have to compete with, both in cd-rom and comics. I mean, you can have a Spielberg on one end and a Harryhausen on the other end and say "Spielberg, hey! He's doing a great job for NOW, but back THEN, Harryhausen did it HIS way and the standard (for special effects and story-telling) is set...

Yeah, that's putting that kind of material a chronological context: who was first. I'm not hung up about being first; a lot of people think I am because I've had so many firsts in my career, but...

...but you were first.

Well, ok, yeah, I was first and I feel fine about that; I feel good about that and anybody would, I mean, feel some pride, some satisfaction in doing that, but I'm not hung up on being first. What I really want to do is be the best. If I happen to be first and best, that's great, you know everyone would love to have their cake and eat it too and if I happen to be first in that field and best in that field I feel like I'm doing a good job.

You definitely did it with SHATTER and you definitely broke that mold when you did IRON MAN: CRASH. It was a hell of a break-through issue and it exceeded everything else but how did the guys at Marvel look at what you were doing with Iron Man; did they understand what you were doing or did they see it as a kind of an oddity?

Well, unfortunately that is something that happens no matter what I do when I am working with another publisher. You cannot expect a publisher to get 100% behind an alien, an innovative, a pioneering concept. They are just not going to fulfill your need completely when it's uncharted territory.

Was that project under DeFalco or under Stan Lee?

That was under the owners of *Marvel*, Mike Hobson and Jim Golden and Jim Shooter, who was Editor-In-Chief at

the time.

Jim Shooter? (we were talking about the popularity of "Shooter-slamming" in a recent CBG. Mike straightened in his chair and, leaning forward, came to his defense)

Jim Shooter was actually a pleasure to do business with.

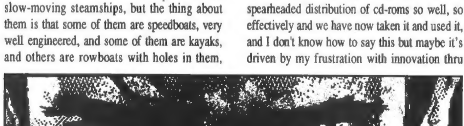
Really?

Yes, he was. What was great about Jim Shooter was that he was very open about the fact that he knew next to nothing about computers, and he put his FAITH in me.

..and it worked.

...And it worked to an extent. As far as you can expect, again, a publisher to go in totally uncharted territory and a completely new concept. So, the way I feel, just to cap off on cd-rom before we move into comics is that right now, you're seeing an explosion of cd-rom. It has been known industry-wide, in the game industry that cd-rom was going to be the platform one day. It has been known since the INCEPTION of cd-rom, which was in the mid-eighties and very few people acted upon it, very few companies big OR small. The thing about a very big company is that it's like a very big steamship that takes a real long time to turn around and head off in a new direction, so little companies have been able to come in and do cd-rom products and you can liken them to little speedboats that can run rings around the big, slow-moving steamships, but the thing about them is that some of them are speedboats, very well engineered, and some of them are kayaks, and others are rowboats with holes in them, right? Well, that's what's gonna happen when you have small ships. So, that's the sad truth about cd-rom companies; product is one thing, the company is another. The way I would compare myself to the companies that are doing things like Joumeyman, Iron Helix and Hell Cab is this: Reactor is a real strong company. It's a small company, so it's like a really high-powered, beautiful little speedboat that has no holes. We carry no debt, we make money, we're lean and mean. It's a great little publishing and development machine that I've built here and I've spent a long time building it and that is something that tells me that we are going to survive and that's my goal. Long-term planning and make sure the company survives as a publisher. Not some flash in the pan that happens to have a couple of hits then goes under because we don't know what to with our money. So right off the bat how Reactor compares to all the other companies is that I think we're better then the big companies because we move faster. We're better then the antelopers and the new companies that are following the cd-rom gold rush especially because we're tight. Quality of content, quality product, this is something we've been focusing on the past two years. We have got, in my opinion, the best, highest quality in cd-rom entertainment in development -not published yet- but it will be apparent when that stuff is published what we have been doing the past two years. We've been doing two very important this in the past 2 years: building the company up making a very tight ship and building a fantastic product and it is more than just development and company...and when I talk about company, company strength, we have been forming excellent strategic alliances with some very good companies -like Sony. We have been setting up some fantastic distribution channels. I mean the fact of the matter is we have spearheaded distribution of cd-roms so well, so effectively and we have now taken it and used it, and I don't know how to say this but maybe it's driven by my frustration with innovation thru history. Orville and Wilbur Wright did not go on to start the number one airline, right? So, quite often pioneers don't know how to commercialize what they invent. That is such a frustration to me that I have always wanted to make sure that anything I pioneer I fully capitalize on and I know that a lot of people are afraid to use this term -exploit. So we're very focused on that, on the business end of the company. We could grow a lot faster, one of the ways we could grow a lot faster is by taking

Donna's origins can be traced to Reactor's adult cd-rom game Virtual Valerie which is being revamped in a "director's cut" version.



Chicago Tribune Nov. 7, 1986 reports that Shatter #1 sold more then 100,000 copies.

REACTOR ARTIST NORM DWYER LETS LOOSE

How many hours a day are you putting in on Donna Matrix?

Quite a few. I've worked 10 to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. I've really been dedicated to this project. It has been my baby right from the start so I really want this book to shine. I want it to look like nothing anyone has ever seen before, because this is truly a landmark book.

How long have you guys been working on it?

From initial concept, Joseph Allen and myself have been working three months, but probably two months on the actual production of the book. It is a fantastic amount of work building a virtual world from the ground up, but the results are stunning and worth every bit of work.

I know that you're 3-D modeling the book...

We 3-D model everything! Everything from start to finish. This include all the characters, their costumes, props and sets. This makes this book a true landmark! A first in the history of comics! No drawing no painting! Everything is 3-D modeled! This technology is amazing! And working on this comic has been a fantastic experience.

And you're moving the scenes around, lighting it and editing and tweaking scenes...

Absolutely! It is just like making a movie. I am the director, cinematographer, stunt coordinator, etc. You name it I am doing it. I have to design and build sets design and build costumes, design and build actors for God's sake! It is an amazing amount of work when I stop to think about it. I am very proud of it.

Do you start from a conventional storyboard? How do you begin when the medium is so different?

I definitely do thumbnails from the script and then set up the scenes to render from that. But the storyboards are not bible. If I come up with something new or if the computer renders a particularly stunning image I will throw the storyboards out the window and make that image a double page spread.

Who scripted it?

Mike scripted it. It was his story from start to finish.

Did any of you other guys contribute to the script?

Only in the sense of cutting some stuff. Mike just ran with it. It is his character and his concept. Mike had the clearest sense of the character. He came up with a really kick-ass story and character. I love it! It is really action packed!

Yeah, it is. now, you came aboard last year?

Yeah. July 1, 1992. It was a hard decision. After years of being self-employed I wasn't to thrilled about the thought of working for someone again. But in the end I decided to take Mike's offer and work at Reactor and I was very excited about it.

...and you met at one of the parties? (Chicago Comic and Cartoonist Professionals, which Norm founded in 1992)

...not really...no. We met quite by happenstance at a bar, through Monte Beauchamp. I was meeting Monte and Mike Flores for a drink. It turned out that Mike (Saenz) was there meeting Mike Flores for the first time and that's how I met Mike. Mike Saenz, that is (laughs).

You guys really started to talk one night at your loft, right? At a party.

No, by the time of that party we had pretty well known each other's work and hit it off. That party was when, I'm pretty sure, Mike met Ken (Holewczynski) for the first time.

...well, there goes the lead to my story (we both laugh).

Back then, you were primarily working in multi-media?

Right. Macromind Director and just about anything else on the Mac. Director is just the shell and there are several other ...programs you have to use with it...something to do the graphics like Photoshop or Illustrator, Swivel 3-D or whatever. Animation programs... it's a whole bag of tricks. All the same things we are using to Donna Matrix.

Your background is really in design?

Yeah, my original schooling was in graphic design but comic books were really always my love and when I came out of college with my BA in Graphic Design I didn't know what to do. I knew that I wanted to pursue comics as a career, though, and that was what I pursued, but it took many years to finally break in such a competitive field.

Where did you go to school?

In my home state of Montana...Montana State University.

How many were in your family?

Six.

Six? Carumba!

A very Catholic family; what did you expect? Lucky there weren't ten! I grew up in the little town of Wolf Point, Montana; 3500 people. When I was I junior high, when all the other kids were quitting reading comics I was still reading them because I had gone beyond the simple entertainment and began to realize that, "Wow! Somebody MAKES these things!".

What year?

Probably about 1973. I know that...I'll tell you this as a cue: like other kids, I guess I thought that comic books just existed, you know, like toys. It never dawned on me that somebody made them, and when I was in junior high...it dawned on me that somebody DRAWS these comics. It was just after Berni Wrightson finished his stint on Swamp Thing and I had never seen it or Bernie's work until six years later, but I kept hearing rumors about it. Where I grew up, you couldn't get back issues of comics; that was an unheard of thing. I found out you could buy back issues and I freaked out. All my life, I drew, I sketched and then I started drawing fantasy characters based on novels I would read and create my own characters, try to visualize them and try to draw my own little comics. When I got out of high school, I still didn't have a firm grasp that people actually made a living doing comic books. I thought that maybe they'd do them as a hobby. When I hit college was when I really began to educate myself and realized that, hey, people could actually make a living doing this.

Did you specifically go there to pursue that?

No, not really. I knew that I wanted to enhance my artistic skills and level of professionalism and I felt that college would really do that for me.

When I went to the Art Institute, I couldn't get into their comics course and it really broke my heart because that was the only reason I was there; to study under these underground guys who were very hot stuff at the time, but couldn't care less about some snot-nose kid...

Yeah, that's something that's always bothered me about comics; the whole arrogance of people doing undergrounds. Like somehow, they are better...I don't know if that's really the case, but it bothered me that they were somehow better than people doing commercial comics, as if there were something wrong with it. I respect their work, don't get me wrong, but it enrages me that they cop an attitude about it. What better illustration of that hypocrisy than some little punk like Gary Groth, running around with such arrogance trying to pump up comics as this incredible fine art, and then for the last three years has been nothing more then a major pornographer...it dumfounds me.

Alien angst from Star Trek '92 annual

Absolutely, under the guise of it being some international sensation, some fine art kind of thing.

Yeah, it's ridiculous. Comic art is not like making toasters. You can't set out to make art. In one sense, art has a life of it's own. That's why someone like Jack Kirby, who pursued comics as a way out of the inner city of New York for a life that he was hoping would be better, simply transcended making commercial product and made it an art. It wasn't that he set out to do that, I believe, he had strong vision and strong personality and art just kind of comes out of that.

He certainly was imitated.

Yes, but that was out of necessity because Jack was selling. That had people aping him more than because he was a visionary. How many people were aping Bernie Krigstein? Yet, they loved his work or for that matter, how many aped Alex Toth, they thought he was a genius and loved him, too, but Jack Kirby was selling like nuts.

So, you left college and did...Libby Ellis?

Denver had this really great comic scene happening, this group of talented creators called Acme Comic Group who were doing a fanzine. When I got there, they just decided to do it as a comic book. For me, getting out of college and working with them for four years, I felt like it was like doing graduate work. (laughs) I felt like I was going to get my Master's Degree in comics because we had such insightful people working within the group that couldn't have asked for a better education in comics...and yet not pretentious.

(Continued on page 19)

MIKE SAENZ *(from page 7)*

venture capital. I'm not interested in <u>vulture</u> capital. I'm not interested in having a partner bringing someone in who owns a piece of my company just by virtue of the fact that he has a lot of money that I don't have. So we are growing in pace with the industry. What you will see when go to a consumer electronics show or trade show, you will see some very big flashy booths, fantastic exhibits; people are putting on a big show of force and a big show of money. A lot of that money is invested money; it's not money that has actually come in to their company from making cd-rom product and selling it. You will see Reactor's booth out exhibit is a modest 10 x 20 foot multi media booth. It's very misleading ..We have the numbers; we have the best selling cd- rom titles; other people, they have fake numbers, lots of money that they get from venture capital and maybe five years out, five years from now they may go under.

Exactly, when I was at CES I looked at the immensity of that Nintendo exhibit and I saw corporate money. But ..and I'm not saying that because I'm sitting in front of you because you know I wouldn't b.s. you. When you see Reactor or hear Reactor you think <u>mystique</u> as opposed to corporate image.. You know there's something going on in there or there something very interesting that going on in there.

Now that's certainly a different subject because in the case of Nintendo, Nintendo spends millions of dollars on their exhibits at CES, but they have billions of dollars. It's not invested dollars but it's actually profits that they make on their games you know.

The technology is a little older and slower, but they know how to exploit and how to market.

Well, as with any new medium, whenever there's any new form of entertainment, whenever there's any new "big thing" the people who start out with it are not, often, the big companies. Quite often they're small companies or individuals who are forward-thinking and visionary and there's a mystique about scrappy little entrepreneurs but that's romanticizing it a bit. It has a lot to do with a company's ability to get the word out about that company. Reactor has only so much money we can afford to pay out for public relations and advertising and marketing and especially on that

public relations front. So, there maybe mystery regarding Reactor. *(Mike chuckles at the word **mystique**)* We may be essentially unknown -a dark horse- but it's not because we're crafting a "mystique", it's simply because we don't have the resources of a company like Sony or Nintendo.

I don't think it's a mystique born that way as much as one associated with creativity...

Well, see, this is the thing. What we are is small and creative, ok? And innovative. Other companies are small and so there is mystery about small companies and "mystique" about Reactor, see what I'm saying? Right now, we have a cult following, but tomorrow that may be a mass audience and we're taking it one step at a time and building the company up brick-by-brick and I'm really satisfied with the way it's grown but again, I'm speaking from inexperience because it's the first time I've had a company of this nature so a lot of the stuff we're confronting every day is completely brand new. We're learning. I enjoy it; I'm learning something that has been closed to creative people for so long. Creative people tend to close themselves away from it.

Do you mean technology?

Technology and business. Especially business. Business is all of that boring stuff that creative people don't want to know anything about.

MBAs were created FOR creatives so Creatives could support themselves when they hit the streets (we both laugh) and, unfortunately, too many of them blow off the essentials of surviving in the real world.

Creative people make, I think, the best businessmen, but I don't want to get into the whole society, the whole social structure and why creative people aren't more savvy when it comes to commercial endeavors or business, but I will say this about it: what drives a lot of artists to do what they do is they have a talent, they love their talent, they develop their talent, they love the work and they say, "wouldn't it be great if I could get paid scads of money to be doing this." Well, that's inherently a lazy attitude. That's the same as saying, "wouldn't it be great to be getting paid to have fun," and that's how I got into this career; but after years of struggling, I decided that I was going to have to learn something about business, I'm going to have to work hard to make anything work...

It worked, Mike! (I laughed) You did ok!

Isn't that amazing? A revelation; I woke up and smelled the coffee.

You didn't want to live on $50 dollars a page, huh?

That's right. And this is something that a lot of creative people -a lot of friends of mine still do not understand.

I see the same kind of things continually. You see people - their talent is exceptional, they have a good reputation and a good following and yet, they're living with a roomie in a dive, they haven't got a car and they can't make the rent and I wonder, "what's wrong with this picture?" Is it the industry or is it them?

Yeah, I know what you mean. What's wrong with that picture is that creative person is ignoring something they should be learning, which is business. It's a hot and sexy thing to be a young entrepreneur, and a SUCCESSFUL one and everybody would like to do that without having to ever experience some of the pain...

I'd like to just shake some of these guys and give them a simple lesson in goal-setting; what are you doing today? What are you doing in 10 minutes? What are you doing in a year? What are you going to be doing in 3 years? Are you still going to be in the same spot? NO! No you won't!

And I was just as ignorant. I thought that something would come up -some BIG corporation would notice me...it's the classic thing of waiting for somebody to discover you on the street in front of the drugstore...

...And be saved.

...It's not gonna happen

Right!

You're going to have to save yourself...

...Make it happen...

Yeah, exactly. It's not fair to look at all of the success stories in entertainment and say, "hey! look at that! You know so and so was discovered this way and became a millionaire!". It's a big part of American culture, the get-rich-quick scheme. Especially in entertainment.

Well, the ability -the frontier- is there.

While many of these success stories are true, they are few and far between, when you really look at it. I had a great experience while living in New York, because what I discovered while in New York was that there were a lot of creative people and they were working very, very hard and they were brilliant and they weren't getting anywhere I just couldn't figure it out. In fact , I was in an Art Director's office once and ...this guy came in. This guy was a phenomenal painter who could paint rings around me yet I had a job with that magazine and he didn't. And their eyes glazed over when they looked at his portfolio and they sent him away. It had a lot to do with the fact that the content of his portfolio was simply not commercial enough.

Just did not have a focus. Just did not have a focus for business.

A commercial application for his work.

You were storyboarding, weren't you?

I was storyboarding very briefly in Chicago.

Alex (Ross) came off of the board, too.

I did this because I had been working in the comic book industry for four, five or six years and, at that time, was getting one of the highest page rates that you could get in the comic industry which was $250 dollars a page illustrating stories for Marvel's *Epic Illustrated.*

What was it like working for Epic?

I started working for them even before Epic was launched. I didn't do much, but it was over a long period of time that I did things periodically at the same time was doing a lot of graphic design and commercial illustration locally here in Chicago *(I mentioned to Mike that I remembered and often clipped out his ads for Park West in Chicago because I was trying to crib his style)* and then I went into storyboarding because I realized that all of that work wasn't paying well enough and especially the comic book work, while it was very creative, satisfying, on the creative side was just so few and far between, that I took on some storyboarding work and I got very excited because it was fantastic money and the one thing that drove me crazy about it was that I'd get a job at 5 PM that was due at 5 AM that'd be something like a 26 frame, color storyboard and that was when I decided to look into computer graphics because I thought computer graphics would definitely help me do this.

I*s that when you were starting to work on that first Mac II?*

No, this was before the Mac came out. This was Apple II in 1983. I had a C64 and an Apple II.

I swear that I first met you at Ray Vogue (College of Design) learning the Mac IIE and you had just done Shatter and the instructor mentioned you and I yelled, "hey! I know this guy!" (we laugh) You had that little Mac II...

That wasn't a Mac II...let me tell you this story: in '83, I got into these computers because I said that I was going to use these to do storyboarding and I had a friend, his name was Mark Kanter, and he was involved in computer graphics and computer games. He told me that there was this computer coming in 1984 called the Macintosh from Apple, so when he described it to me, I HAD to get it. So I got one and I was one of the first people to own one in early 1984.

Was that LISA?

No, that was the Mac 128K. I was immediately disappointed with it because it was black and white; this was something that I didn't know. I was going to use it for storyboarding. Well, there was no way that I was going to sell storyboarding printed out on a dot matrix printer, so I was really at a loss. So, I had this computer, and in those days there were probably three pieces of software for it...

MacDraw, MacPaint and...

MacWrite. Those were the three *(laughter).* So what was I going to do with it? I had almost completely turned my back on comics and I reexamined it that night and found that I could do a computer comic book. I really didn't know that it would be the first one in history, I really had no idea. I assumed that the world was very big and that someone must've done this, I hadn't kept my ear to the ground that much in the comic book industry. I asked around and, no, they hadn't heard of anyone creating a computer-generated comic book and then one day I was walking into Mack's Tap on the north side in Chicago and I ran into somebody who said hello and he knew me and it was Peter Gillis. He had met me at a comic convention or something. I said, "Yeah, that's what I need, I need a writer" I asked him, "have you been writing for comic books?" and he said, "Yeah, I've been working on three of four books "...

That was with First?

He was doing *Warp* and *Micronauts* for Marvel and he was doing a slew of *What Ifs* and stuff and I really didn't know how to judge this. I didn't know if he was a good writer or not. So I asked around and people said, "oh yeah, Peter...he's a good writer".

Warp sprang from Stuart Gordon's Organic Theatre trilogy.

Well, I said I had this project in mind and I'd like him to take a look at it. So I invited him up to my place, I showed him the Mac, showed him the pages of this comic book I was working on. I was calling it Zero. It's like a binary thing, you know, zero and one. It was about this customs officer at an intergalactic space port or something like that. He was blown away. I didn't know him that well at the time but in retrospect I could see that he was flabbergasted and stunned by the implications of a computer comic book and he assured me that no one had ever done it before. In his opinion he thought that we could get press from all over the world, so he was on board, he wanted to be on board, he wanted to write it. It was so much work for me to do a comic book at that time I took him on and said, "yeah, you're gonna write it and so he submitted a couple of proposals and I read them, I jammed with him a little bit, we got a fairly good script together and we called it SHATTER. We changed the name. And we shopped it around and one of he first places I took it to was Marvel. I took it to my old editor at *Epic Illustrated,* Archie Goodwin and he turned it down. I know in hindsight this is completely ridiculous, right?

Well, ya gotta smile...

Here's what he said: TOO GIMMICKY. *(silence)* In hindsight with all the gimmicks that we've seen...

-From the land of five different covers on an X book...

Right!

If they can emboss it, die-cut it, throw a hologram on it and kick up the price a buck for it, Marvel's done it.

Well, he just didn't know, ok? I don't fault him for it. I feel bad that we didn't do that book with Marvel because it would've spared me a tremendous amount of grief that I had with First Comics, but I didn't know that at the time. So, eventually by the time that First Comics was ready to go

with it it was already 1985 and I had come up with SHATTER a year ago!

(At this point, Tony Akins stops in and politely circumvents the desk and the laughter. It's raining outside with a fury that Chicago had not beheld in over thirty years. Golfball-sized hail pounds the roof and does hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to a local auto dealership. My daughters are at home watching pieces of our second floor rip loose as a tornado is tracked nearby. When the hail slows down, they run outside with Baggies to preserve as many as possible. A neighbor's Vette gets bulleted with dings and dents in the maelstrom and yet, despite the torrent outside, artists and writers slowly make their way to Reactor for a night of quiet industry-talk and munchies. Such is the lure of kindred-kinder; every species prefers its own kind...).

So, that was the Mac, and once I got in the Mac, once *Shatter* had come out, it made a big -a very significant impact- in the computer industry. It was hailed, essentially as a precursor to what became the desktop publishing industry. So, suddenly I was credited with being like, more of a brilliant person then I have a right to be considered...

A visionary.

Well, suddenly they thought I was just...THE most innovative goon using a computer that'd ever come down the pike.

Well, you stuck two things together that had never been put together before.

this is something that is highly valued in the computer industry.

I remember picking that up, buying it on the stands and I remember the look and the feel of that thing.

Well, this was something that wasn't necessarily highly-prized by the comics industry. The newest ideas in comics are always met with skepticism, but not in the computer industry, you see. The computer industry embraces innovation...

It blew people's minds; you don't have to please everybody, you just have to please your core audience, which at the time was me (we laugh) I said, "I gotta HAVE this, I gotta see how this was done!" .

I knew I was hitting a group of people that would later come to me, and mind you, this was when I was essentially looking for employment wherever I could find it, whether it was doing freelance illustration or what have you, so I always thought that someday maybe one of these kids reading *Shatter* would one day give me a good job. *(laugh)* So, after *Shatter*, I went and did a couple of other things. One of the first things I did was to move to New York and worked on a couple of programs. And I worked on a few games and a few programs...

...ComicWorks?

ComicWorks with Macromind, which was published by Mindscape, a program which was creating comic books on the Macintosh and that made a big stink in the Macintosh industry for a short while because here was this fun program...it was when Pagemaker was coming out and it was considered a totally radical idea to create pages on your computer. I went from that and created "MacPlaymate" which was the first interactive erotic product and that one took me quite by surprise because I thought it was perfectly natural to create a little game like that.

So, just for the hell of it, you threw together a little shareware program on our own?

Literally for the hell of it, it wasn't for the shareware, though. It was sold by this publishing company, Pegasus, for several years and it sold fantastically well.

I guess I owe you a few bucks (laugh).

It was MASSIVELY pirated, there's no question about it. I'm not hung up about piracy because there enough people who buy software that you can't get really get hung up about piracy. but MacPlaymate was definitely pirated like mad and it just sent shockwaves throughout the computer industry. So what I did notice was this: whether it was *Shatter* or *MacPlaymate* or whatever, I was well received in the computer industry. And I had kind of a big selling titles in the comic industry but luke warm reception and I knew I wouldn't become a fan favorite. But I was building a huge fan base in the computer industry specifically the Macintosh industry. So I embraced it whole heartedly after I finished the Iron Man book. After I finished the Iron Man book I really didn't think that I would ever do comic books again. But mind you, that's from the perspective of actually doing a comic book for another publisher.

But you had a really good hand.

Yeah, but all the frustration that came with innovating something and then expecting a publisher to understand it completely and market it appropriately... those are the frustrations I experienced, and so I said "I'm never going to publish comic books again, rather I'll never make comic books again unless I can publish them. And since I didn't really envision getting enough money and ponying up what I need to publish comic books the way I wanted to publish them for a long time, I just set off into computers and that was when I started Reactor and built up what I have now. So it really wasn't until recently that I started reexamining comic books again and and it had a lot to do with the fact that I had set up this publishing machine. And developing cd-rom product took a long, long time. There were these very long and involved complex production -very expensive to produce. And I said "We really have the facilities to publish more then we actually develop". So since there's not a lot of great cd-rom product out there that I can publish by other parties I saw that we could finally publish comic books the way I always wanted to publish them. That really marks the birth of digital comics and the Donna Matrix

book. As a concept however Donna Matrix is something that I have been toying with and wanted to do as a CD rom game for years. It is a concept that's been one of my pet projects for something like four years, and I never thought it would come out as a comic book first, I always imagined it would be a cd-rom game .

Well the nice thing again about the comic is that your putting the look and the feel of that cd-rom technology into a persons hand that normally couldn't get their hands on a cd-rom game.

YEAH! You know the thing I love about computer graphics is it has candle power. There's life on that screen, you know. This is what we love about television. This is what we love about film. It's an image that's on fire; it's glowing. It just moves. It's dynamic, it's animated, and it's got audio. This is one of my frustrations in comic books . Comic books have to be likened to paper movies, you know; you have to write KABLAM on the page, the bigger you write it the louder it's supposed to be.. Comic books are like the abstract art form really, and it really begs a lot of the reader. The reader really has to be a participant of the experience. There's a way you have to read comic books that you must learn and it demands a lot from you. One thing I think it demands from the audience is patience to hold back and not flip to the last page to see what happens. To kind of cover the second page with your hand and ignore it.

You're right, you're right (laughter)

While you read it panel by panel. What I love about doing computer games, which is the same thing people love about directing motion pictures and television shows, is that you're completely controlling moment by moment what they're experiencing and so it's a lot easier to view and asks less of the audience and so it puts less demands on them. That plus the dynamics aspects and all that stuff is what really kind of turned me off to comics. And when I look at Donna Matrix on the screen when you have the 3-d model up on there and we're moving it around, we're actually doing some animation sequences. It's fantastic. It makes my heart beat very fast. When we then take that image we composite it on a page and print that out. Whether it's just a proof on our color printer or we print color separations, it's flat. It no longer glows. We can't interact with it, it's not animated, you know we can't put in audio, we have to put in conventiona comic book effects: kablam, kapow.

It still works. The color is exquisite and you've put a spatial quality into that book.

It definitely comes across. It's not as you said earlier, cd rom technology. It's computer graphics imaging technology that we're actually bringing to the pages in a comic book for the first time. It's what you might consider a purist's approach to computer generated comic books. Everything is 3-d modeled because that is pure computer graphics.

And yet it is still an artist that is controlling it, and I think there's a certain feeling of animosity out there toward high tech because there are people out there that were trained with a piece of graphite. They just can't see beyond that piece of black and white but they forget that you, Norm and Joe and the people that are all here are all people who have worked in the media and continue to work in the media and you're just taking it that extra step. What I thought was kinda ironic was looking at Adam Kubert in an article that I think I dropped off here, talking about how they were finally coloring and separating the stuff using desktop technology, which is stuff you had done more then ten years ago. And it's still flat you know, and they still can't get it.(laughter)

Well, it's not more then ten years ago; it's more like seven or eight years ago now that I was doing what might be called color prepress lithography research and development. The great thing about it is creative people are now using computer graphics imaging tools.

Right! People are not afraid to use these tools.

People are basically discovering that you're not going to get a guy who never learned how to visualize anything to use a computer graphics imaging technology to do anything that really impresses you or has any artist merit or any commercial visual impact. This is something that is not unique to Reactor. It's across the board. More and more graphic designers, artists and illustrators are using computers now then ever before in history and it is no longer the realm of the suits and high priests of technology.. This is what is referred to when you think of animosity. Let me start again: when people say they have animosity toward computer graphics imaging, that usually is rooted in this perception that some guy in a suit is sitting there in a well-kept office with a cold terminal, you know, and all these buttons

Telling you that you're obsolete

Right, exactly. That's the classic image. That's not the case anymore. You have are some really funky artists in every level of the entertainment industry and arts who are using computer imaging. My vision for computer comic books, I realize now in hind sight, was ten years too soon and comic books like Donna Matrix were still to early. Your not going to have the entire comic book industry doing CGI comics for another ten years to twenty at least.

There's no question that it's still going to stand out but at the same time, it's a lot like the first time somebody decided to use an airbrush and separate this stuff as four color art. Like the books in which I can say I see your style. You know, I was trying to think of it as I was driving here today and I'm trying to think how I would define it. It's the Warren style, I consider your stuff the Warren style.

It *is* the Warren style. That's very astute because what I learned about making comic books I learned largely from reading Warren's comic books, and that was the first

professional work I did in comics.

Yes. I remember it very well with envy.

My first professional work was for Warren. I did Creepy and Eerie in 1984 but I think that was after Warren's really hot period. I was coming in late but I learned a lot about comics and comic art by looking at the works of people like Richard Corben who frequently graced the pages of Warren.

Now Corben has been an enigma himself. I remember reading I think it is Dragons Wit #1 It had that first Den in there; that first color piece with those very subtle shades. You knew there was something very speciacular there. And somehow the rest of the industry just never got it (laughter).

Well, I mean what Corben does is immensely difficult even for Corben. It's something you cannot see adopted by the entire industry because it represents so much rendering work. However, my impression upon seeing Corben for the first time was that this is how all comic books should look. They should all be this realized and rendered.

Well, don't turn out twelve a year, turn out three a year. But make them three you'll want to keep.

Yeah, maybe so, but this I think is where we finally are today. CGI essentially renders so beautifully that it can be likened to Corben's approach to comic books.

Yes, in the proper hands.

And I have just the highest praise and respect for Corben's work, and I'm not saying that what we're creating is a digital Corben technology that everybody can use to all look like Corben, however, what Corben has been able to achieve is a level of photo-realistic rendering, and this is the goal of computer graphics imaging. In photo realistic rendering, Corben uses an airbrush and uses Prisma color pencils and other things at his disposal to do nice fluid blending of values. With computer technology we use shading to get an affect that's quite similar to the rendering capability that Corben has in his talent and it shows in his work

So talent has to be there first to make it happen, and what you're really doing is more of a hybrid; by that I mean it's a progressive thing, that owes a lot to talent like the Warren people. When someone first said, "Let's half tone this book" as opposed to doing hard line and then somebody after that saying, "Why don't we do color". I remember Rich Corben coloring those Eisner's for Warren and I thought, "Cripes, this is spectacular work". It reaches a gut level because there's a better color saturation, and there's a real movie quality and that's what I see happening in your stuff.

This is another aspect of Corben's work, aside from the actual technical rendering capability. Corben has always had a real great cinematic sense. This is one of the things the computer graphics imaging tools we're using allows us to do, because the tool we actually use is not really for creating comic books. It's not designed for that, it's designed for making animation. So you've got a virtual camera, and you can position around and put it anywhere you want. These tools are used for setting up motion sequences and these are real tools that are used for motion picture production companies and television production companies to do computer animation.

Can I ask what program you work on?

Electric image animation system: EIAS. And what is so amazing is that when we set up a scene like when Donna kicks someone in the head and he flies and hits the wall, we set it up like animation, but we just don't render out all the frames in between, we just render out the key frames. *(laughter)*

But the look and the lighting of great film is there and the fluid movement is there.

A question I was asked recently, which I thought was really,

really hilarious, was they said, "So how is it that you use computer colorization process?" *(laugh)* And see, we don't use a colorization process at all -what we do is we look at the attributes of somebody's head and we set it to a flesh tone and we set the specular highlights, which is either going to make her look like plastic or flesh or like metal or whatever. Then we put a light over her head or a light, or multiple lights, where we want them, and we choose the colors of the light. So it's very similar to setting up a scene on a motion picture set, I suppose where you become like the lighting technician and the clothes designer and you say this will be a shiny blue jacket or it's going to be a black leather jacket or whatever. Once we set that up -because it's a 3D model attribute now, or a rendering attribute attached to a 3D object, it's set once -that's it- you don't have to set it again. You don't have to sit there and draw Batman's boot 500 times and color it 500 times. You set it

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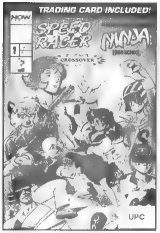

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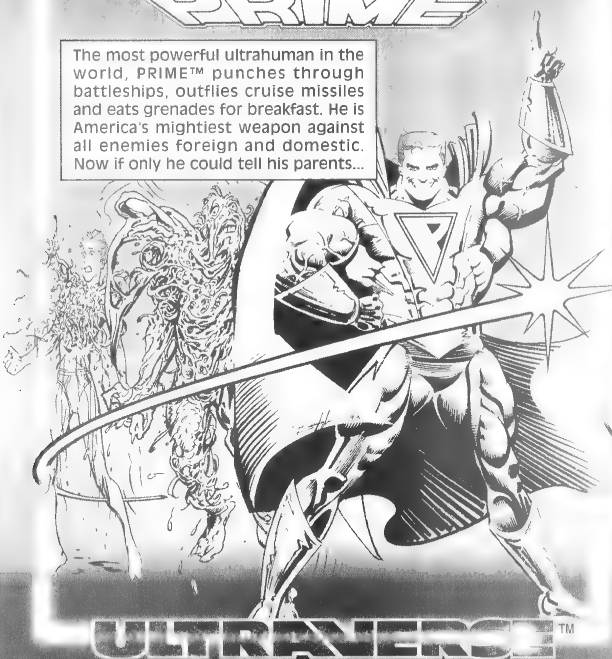

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up only once: that is Batman's boot, this is the color. I never have to touch it again

Rotating and positioning it the way you want it, as opposed to letting the pen lead you, and the deadline lead you, because the pen is restrictive. You can go back and keep re-cutting that scene until you get it just where you want it.

Right, so it's almost like they're not real, ok? It's virtual. It's almost a virtual reality. It's a simulation. It's almost like setting up a bunch of puppets. Like when your a kid and your playing on your mom's coffee table with your little G.I. Joe dolls. You set up your puppets and now you set up what angle you want to look at them. You position G.I. Joe's fist hitting some alien in the head or whatever. That is the approach and where it becomes abstract is that none of this stuff really exists beyond the numeric data that's buried inside of these programs.

But once it hits paper it does. (laughter)

Right. Once it hits the paper there it is. So this is something I dealt with back in 1984 and '85 when people asked me about *Shatter*, "Where are the original pages?". There are none. This is not even a concern.

They're in there. There in that box. There are all kinds of good things in there and plenty more.

What we have is not original art, we have data. That's it. We have this huge data base of Donna Matrix images and all these different projects: here she is running down the street and here is Donna hanging off a spaceship and here is Donna running and firing off her gun and it's all 3D data. And it's very useful in that form because now you can animate with it. You can create animation sequences and computer graphic sequences with it you can now put it into a cd-rom . The sky's the limit, you know.

In other words you can model that after George Reeves and George Reeves could fly again

Uh-huh. Yeah, and that's another thing I don't like about the way comic books are reproduced conventionally is that every time an artist changes, you know, when a new artist writer/team comes into a book, consistency is lost. How many different images of Batman do we have?

Well to me, growing up reading the silver age and growing up with Bob Kane's style, right now, there's for better and for worse. Right now I just see a lot of confusion of styles. I mean Arkham Asylum could have been a great book, but to me, it was an overpriced, hard-to-read mess.

Well, I've been talking to a lot of comic book fans lately and you know what? It's a whole new breed. Sure there's golden age and silver age and all these different ages, but you know what? Today's comic book fans only know Valiant and Image and a little bit of Marvel and D.C., but not much else. Some of today's comic book fans aren't even aware, mind you, of Dark Horse or any of their products at all. Not even aware of them...

It's kinda of scarry.

It is spooky because when you go into a comic shop, a lot of comic book shops have everything. They have all of these books.

But you're doing what they're actually looking for, in an odd sense, because when they look at a Valiant book they're looking at...well, look at a Continuity book. If you pick up any Continuity book you are looking at a Neal Adams clone. If you're picking up any Valiant book you are looking at a Barry Windsor-Smith clone or a Rob Leifield clone. If you look at Donna Matrix she will be consistently perfect forever. No matter who works on it.

Right, no matter who picks it up and who's doing the imaging not drawing, right?

This is like the Marilyn Monroe mystique: she won't age.

Right.

She'll always be perfect. She can only get better.

Right, as technology improves, we can increase the number of polygons that she's made up of, and we can refine her model. But she will always be a model, you know, she'll always be a 3D model. She can only get better but there's this fantastic consistency. There's another problem: even the best comic book artist has continuity trouble.

Tell me about it...

-Of drawing their character to look the same in every frame.

Time constrictions the fan doesn't realize are there but that drives really every artist. And just the physical act of redrawing that face every goddamn time!

Right! It gets tiring. Everyone gets burned out on a book. Even if it's something they created and have complete creative license and their making the best money they possibly can and they have the best deal in comic book history. Even that person will get tired of drawing this character.

Could Donna Matrix be produced on a monthly basis?

What's spooky is it could probably be produced on a weekly basis. The only reason that we can't produce it right now on a weekly basis is that we need some new systems in here that will render faster. Because the actual work that's involved is not thinking of what she does on a given page, or how a page breaks down. It's not actually setting up the shots, it's the actual rendering time to render out those images at this slow speed of the computers, even though we have very fast computers with these Quadras now, of actually setting up these projects. When we move to Silicone Graphics workstations to do Donna Matrix we could easily do it on a monthly schedule and perhaps maybe a biweekly schedule but the market, I don't think, is ready for that kind of volume.*(laughter)*

But Americans are growing up (laughter). You went to school here in Chicago? Big family?

I'd say a modestly sized family. My family is split up all over the country. There's like a New York clan, and I'm from the Chicago clan.

How many kids in your immediate family?

In my immediate family I have 3 siblings. A brother and two sisters.

I know the brother. Anybody else who's looking into art?

In the entire clan that I'm aware of, I have only one cousin in New York who is an aspiring artist. It's not something that really runs in my family at all.

So you went to school here in Chicago?

I went to school here in Chicago. There's not much to say about it. I went to The American Academy of Art for, like, one semester and prior to that I'd gone to Lane Tech High School.

I went to Gordon Tech, just across the Addison street bridge.

Oh, great we were neighbors! Lane Tech had a fantastic art curriculum. I don't know how it is today but at that time, it was unbeatable. I would credit it as being college level art courses. I was a four year art major there. It was such a damn good school. Unlike all the other high schools kids, I actually paid attention because I was serious about illustration and art since I was a little kid. I really found that when I went to The American Academy of Arts, I didn't need to be there at all.

Were you a good student?

Was I a good student? I was a great art student. I think everything else I was just bored with. I got good grades in a couple of classes but for the most part I was a trouble maker.

Good to hear (laugh).

I was too busy flirting with girls and goofing off and being a class clown. That's a very strict school. I think it was every week that I was going down to detention.

What year did you graduate?

'77. It's such a huge high school and it was still predominantly male. It's still very strict -like boys high schools tend to be, so I had a difficult time of it. It's hard enough being a teenager but I think I had an exceptionally hard time of it, personally, because that school was so strict and I was such an imaginative little artist kid.

Then you went to one semester of -one year of...

One semester of The American Academy of Art and I just said, "That's it!".

I lasted one year at the Art Institute.

And mind you, I took a lot of other courses, very formal courses outside of school -summer schools and such- and I took a lot of formal art training courses. I was very serous about it. So it was something I chose to do. My parents, you know while they were very supportive, it wasn't something they did. I used to see other kids in school that had talent that should have been nurtured but was just squashed by giving it to much attention.

Yeah.

I remember a kid who was very talented, who's mother forced him to work four hours each day at a drawing board in a little studio they had set up for him the basement of their home, or something like that. And the thing was, he didn't draw for fun. He didn't enjoy it, it wasn't something he got off on. I personally would--couldn't of torn a paper and pencil away from me. I was constantly sketching.

Was it comics or was it fine arts or somewhere in between?

What, this guy or me?

You.

Me, oh just everything. I've always been just visually...you know...

Were you looking toward comics then?

The thing about it you see...I was never really a fanboy...

STORMIN' NORMAN *(continued from page 9)*

It opened the door to First?

Malibu published Libby Ellis, but strangely, it WAS First that I approached because through some friends I heard that Chicago was a pretty happening town. My wife and I flew out here for a week to interview; she was a graphic designer and she interviewed with design firms while I interviewed with First. I met Alex Wald at that time .. he seemed to like my work, but he didn't have any work for me. Alex asked me to stay in touch. Three months later we moved to Chicago . I tried again to get into comics and couldn't quite do it, so I took a full-time job doing "old-fashioned" multi-media doing slide shows and video. Shortly into that, Tom Mason from Malibu called about Libby Ellis. He had seen the promotional package Dennis Pimple and I had sent Gary Groth at Fantagraphics when he had worked there, and he was interested in Libby Ellis. Mike Friedrich of StarReach was a very big help at that time and gave us a lot of encouragement.

How long did it run?

Eight issues...over two years. After black and white comics pretty much bottomed out, we got tired of doing it, called Malibu and said we didn't want to renew our contract...we wanted to cool it for a while. That was when a friend said that Now Comics was looking for an artist for Speed Racer.

...the infamous part.

Tony Caputo called me after receiving my submissions and said (dropping his voice), "I want you to draw Speed Racer." So I went and talked to him and negotiated out a year contract and jumped at the opportunity. I quit my job and started doing comics full-time.

...didn't work well, did it?

...well, it was frustrating working for Now Comics. The first month was fine, got paid on time, 30 days after I turned in the artwork. The next issue it was 60 days before I got paid. Next issue: 90 days and the next issue, 120 days. I was happy with that, I was calling them constantly, and visiting the office trying to get paid...

At what point did you cut it off with them?

Well, I was always at the point where I reached my limit and said, 'this is it', when they always came across. The longest I let them get behind by 5 months, which was an obscene amount of time when you think about it, but my wife was gainfully employed, thank god, and we had long discussions that this was a good opportunity. This was my big break to show other publishers like DC and Marvel that I could handle a monthly book and do good art. I was using this as a stepping stone which these little parasitic publishers like Now Comics and Comico take advantage of, well, that's their role. They exploit it. I was exploited, but I knew it going in. Now had a bad reputation for paying creators. Joe Philips, my predecessor on Speed Racer was in the Comics Journal complaining about not getting paid by NOW the same month that Tony was offering me the job. So I didn't get tricked into it. I dealt with a publisher who was a...liar, and would make every excuse in the book for not paying, meanwhile buy himself expensive leather couches for the office and incredibly expensive suits for himself and travel all over the country. I did Speed Racer for 15 issues over a year and a half and then Tony wanted me to develop a new title for him called Neon Knight. I did two issues of Neon Knight, which have never seen print. I never got paid for that work at that time. NOW still owed me $4200 dollars. It was an expensive lesson. When NOW Comics came back, after being bought out by Julian and Bernie Berkin of General Learning Corporation, Tony paid me what he owed me, disguised as an inflated page rate on a Twilight Zone Story. Tony tripled my page rate to make up what he owed me. But then it took six months to get that money! It's sad that publishers like that exist.

Unfortunately, Chicago seemed to be a Mecca for publishers like them.

That is because it is Chicago, Mark. It's not unique to comics, but Chicago has a real tendency to exploit workers.

It's a Sinclair Lewis kind of thing...

Yes, they have a long history of such things; it's in the character of the people who start businesses here, I don't know what it is.

You come here looking for justice, that's what you'll find, just us. So after that, you went to...

I thought, what publisher do I want to work for and naturally, I thought of Marvel or DC. Not that I was a fanboy of superheros or anything, but I could smell where the money was (laugh) and I was tired of getting kicked around by this little rinky-dink publisher and I wanted to work for a real, solid company...and there were only, really, two characters that I really wanted to do and they were Doc Savage which DC was publishing, and Nick Fury which Marvel as publishing. I did sample pages for both and sent them directly to the editors. None of this "talent coordinator" b.s. that they try to get you to work through.

To my amazement I got an offer to pencil an issue of Nick Fury. I'm the kind of guy who likes to take one page a day and really enjoy it. Unfortunately I had to crank this issue out and it really left a bad taste in my mouth. I had to send out work that I really wasn't satisfied with and consequently, didn't follow up on any Marvel work. My intuition was that they were a little disorganized there.

I met Neil Pozner (talent coordinator at DC) at the 1991 Chicago Comic Convention and he absolutely loved my work. He told me to call him when he got back to New York. I did and he really went to bat for me and got me the Star Trek annual, which really was a little gem. I was really happy. Kim Yale was the editor of that book and it was a good experience working with her.

From there to Dark Horse?

I didn't follow up with DC because I got that Jimmy Piersoll book from Dark Horse, which was thanks to my good friend Paul Guinan. Darkhorse was publishing Paul's Heartbreakers at the time and he was also writing Aliens: Colonial Marines. Paul asked me if I wanted to do the Piersall book because he was doing layouts.

Do you mind that?

Paul is a much different visual story teller then I am and granted, this is a very awkward story to tell; a man's life story in 28 pages, and Paul did it in a very, kind of quick edit, documentary style which was fine, but taught me that I didn't want to work over someone else's layouts again because that is a good chunk of the fun for me. Getting that vision in my mind's eye, laying it out and fully realizing it as art. It was just a good book, a character book. I had to make the people look real and carry a lot of character and help convey a lot of emotion and that's what I like to do in a book, so in that sense, it was

emotion and that's what I like to do in a book, so in that sense, it was wonderful. The inker was Brian Garvey who, I must say, was the very best inker I have ever worked.

I've heard from more then a few of our friends that a common complaint from DC and Marvel is that they want you to stay on model, but don't provide adequate reference material.

Oh, I know. It's so frustrating, Mark, I mean, you and I both come to it from a professional standpoint...it's not how I learned to do business. And I'll tell you one thing that I get really pissed off about; if I hear another editor or publisher complain about how amateur and unprofessional freelancers are, I've just got to throw it right back in their face. I've never worked with an editor or publisher that I thought was professional. Well there are exceptions, Kim Yale at DC and Dark Horse. But in general they are no one to talk, it's like the pot calling the kettle black. Almost every freelancer I know is far more professional than most publishers I've known because they've GOT to...that's how they make their living. You have to be on time and professional. Granted, there are exceptions I've worked with those stereotypical artists who can't make a deadline. Who must have an encyclopedia of excuses for being late. I've met them and I've worked with them, but they're the exception, they're not the rule.

What are your feelings about "polybagging"?

It's been good to the industry in general, but comics are a throwaway medium. That's what makes them collectable. I have a large stack of comics but they're not bagged. I have them not because I collect them, I have them because I enjoy them; that's the difference. It is fine with me if the only way Johnny's dad will accept comic books is as a collectable rather than .. art or acceptable entertainment. Whatever it takes. That way when Johnny's little brother wants to buy comics just to enjoy them, Johnny's dad isn't going to squawk. Comics have always been the bastard child of American entertainment; worse than rock and roll. At least rock and roll is a several billion dollar industry; comics aren't...but they should be. Thank god for Scott McCloud's new book. I applaud him...I only regret that his book is not required reading in every school in America.

One last one. Do you think Marvel or DC would've gone for Donna Matrix?

What a strange question. Yeah, why not? could see DC doing it as part of their Vertigo line...I could definitely see Dark Horse doing it. Marvel? ...nnnnno. They've bought their own myth..there's one thing to creating a PR machine for your own myth but when you start believing it, you're screwed. But then again, who can argue with success

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Scam Free Art!

Here's How To Take Home Kelly Bundy And Become The Envy Of Your Peers...

As we gazed into the pile of artwork accumulating in the corner of the studio, we decided to reward readers of this issue with the chance to scarf up some of this neat collectors booty. The contest is simple: deface this book by sending in the coupon at right. Four readers will score original "Married With Children: Kelly Special #3" pages. Two additional winners will score original color pages by Joe Allen. Multiple coupons are acceptable, reproductions are *not*.

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Ok, so I wanna score with Kelly; it's this Christina Applegate thing I got, ya know? So, here's my personal file, ok? Hey, don't get weird with it or, like, pass it around to mailing lists, ok?

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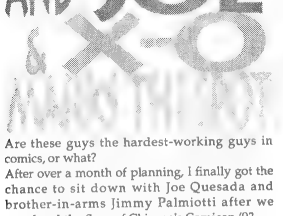
DIGGING FOR GOLD WITH JIMMY AND JOE & X-O AMOTTI



Are these guys the hardest-working guys in comics, or what?

After over a month of planning, I finally got the chance to sit down with Joe Quesada and brother-in-arms Jimmy Palmiotti after we wandered the floor of Chicago's Comicon '93.

Jim and Joe have changed a lot since our introduction in '92. They were scrappier back then, and sharing a small table in the artists' pit they looked tougher, meaner. A year later, the lines wind past several exhibits to get near these superstars. They're leaner looking, exhibiting a sense of style and personal self-assurance that undeniably announces their presence with that unmistakable aura that separates the worshiped from the wanna-bes.

Catching up to J & J is a real hit or miss number. With several books in production between them, this dynamic duo burns up the road, often coming dangerously close to physically burning themselves out while leaving shards of brilliance in their wake. After repeated calls back and forth, our telephone-tag match came to a halt at the Con. It's nothing personal, explained Joe, but in all of the projects and appearances and signings, they never got a chance to actually SEE anything, so we toured the floor visiting dealers, and afterwards, in a quiet, dark corner away from the crowds, we relaxed for a long-overdue chat. Even that would be cut short by a photo-op with Aerosmith and a fast run to another function. If you have to hang with these guys, you'd better have a fast sense of humor and you'd better be ready to run...

Jimmy, looking over everything you've done so far, what's your favorite project?

The one I like the best is the most recent one which is X-O #0...

Joe: ...good answer...

I'm saying that because Joe's right here. No, no,I'm kidding. That's probably like, if I wanted to show someone in the business like, what's the best job you've done so far, I would definitely pick X-O #0 as THE book. I did a couple other things, a book called King Tiger for World's Greatest Comics Universe and that was over Paul Chadwick. That was a lot of fun to work on. Paul looks a little different then he usually looks, but I think he should be happy with it. ...And a couple other things that are coming up that I'm looking forward to.

You're working on Solar, too.

Yeah, Solar is over Peter Grau and it's wonderful stuff. His drawings are very traditional. To me, it looks very much like 50's comic book art, it's very...

(Joe starts making his boot squeak repeatedly as Jimmy continues)

...kinda sounds like gas, doesn't it? Um, it's very traditional comic book storytelling; the stuff is very terrific and it's flawless. Without being "superdynamic" like a 90's book, it's a very good read, good storytelling. It's an easy book for me to ink 'cause he doesn't leave that much for me to do.

Pretty tight?

It's very tight. I like it tight, by the way.

...Who doesn't? Anyway, age, please and are you single?

I'm 31. August 13th I'll be 32 in case anybody wants to send me a present...and I'm single.

Where did you go to school, or where did you find that jumping off point into comics?

Well, I was in 9th grade in a school in Brooklyn and a teacher, without me knowing it, signed me up to go take a test at the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan, New York. She thought I had potential and I looked at it as a day off. I could go in the city and school lets me go and draw some pictures, so I took a test and got accepted into Art & Design and took cartooning and advertising.

So you were going more toward graphic design or cartooning?

Yeah, well you gotta remember the time. This was around '77, '76 and comic books were a little different back then. I used to meet the comic book artists and they always looked like they got thrown off the back of a bus. They were always shaggy and grubby and looked like they

didn't make a dime in the business. I learned early on that it was nice to have money, so I thought let me go after advertising, that might have a better payoff, but I always kept doing the comics and actually, during my last year of high school, I ghosted for a couple of people at Marvel and DC and never got my name on it except for, like, street names and "Jim's Car Wash" and stuff like that. I went to school and there were a couple of guys ahead of me, like Joe Jusko. Joe Rubinstein was 2 years ahead of me...

Rubinstein is part of your posse, isn't he?

We're our own posse, in a way...

Joe: We know a lot of guys in the industry. We drink and terrorize around and...

Jim: We're all pigs, and also a classmate of mine who's made it in the business is Mark Texiera. We were always good friends even though Mark was always the painter who came into school at 6 in the morning and by the time he came to school he'd smell like hell from paint all over him and he'd sit there and... If you learn anything about Mark, he's an unbelievable illustrator and painter.

Did anyone out of that group hit before you?

Oh yeah, Mark did and Rubenstein did and Joe Jusko. What happened was, while I was ghosting in '79, I was getting the worst end of comics. I won't even mention who I was ghosting for, but these guys were the low-lives of comics and they know who they are if they're listening. What they would do is make me work all day. They weren't my kind of low-lives. My kind of low lives are raving alcoholics and stuff like that. They really burned me out of the business because they would pay me next to nothing and I would work day and night trying to impress them. They would go "Great,great, great, whatever, whatever." So, when I graduated High School, I went to College at New York City Technical and I took advertising. I had Art Direction jobs when I got out of college, then I went into photo retouching which of course was the next natural step, *-not!*

But it paid the bills.

It paid the bills and I was learning how to use an airbrush and every kind of tool known, until the computers started taking over a little bit. The company owners gave me a quarter of the company and all of a sudden I was an owner with responsibilities I didn't really want. So I got back into comics. Am I answering this question too long?

No, go for it!

This is probably three or four questions in one. While I was working up there I always wanted to get back into comics. I always read them, even though I stopped for a whole bunch of years. I stopped buying them, I stopped looking at them because I very frustrated with them. I sat there thinking I could do better than that, what the hell is that, you know.

Well that's kinda where I was going to. You were looking at the stuff that was out on the market and what propelled you to go back in? Was it looking at other peoples stuff saying "I could beat this guy"?

Well, no. There was inspirational stuff. When I was younger, initially, I got into things: there were three or four issues of *Captain America* by Steranko. I had multicopies of these books.

I remember those...

I had a lot of them. Like kids buy 12 books now, I bought them 'cause I was afraid I might lose one. *Conans*, Barry Smith's *Conan and the Red Nails* stuff and the black and white books, that stuff inspired me. Then later on Craig Russell's stuff on *War of the Worlds* just blew me away.

Very nice work.

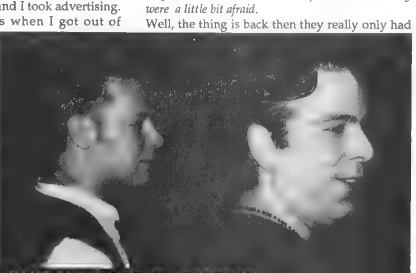
And again, this is the time where ...

Joe Q: It's all forgotten stuff, too.

Yeah, it's forgotten. And people say, "*War of the Worlds*? I saw it, good movie, they all died there". There was a whole bunch of stuff being put out at a time when comics were terrible and Marvel II and I was the deepest thing you could find, *Spider-man* and whoever.

It was as if they knew they had good properties but they weren't really sure what the hell to do with them. I got that impression especially looking at Steranko's and bringing up Barry Smith too, that they had a talent but it didn't fit the mold. They were a little bit afraid.

Well, the thing is back then they really only had



one mold to set where now anything goes. Back then guys like Bill Sienkewicz were getting in slowly and you see Bill more and more. Readers who like myself are getting older are looking for an alternate other than the regular stuff and you'd go to Marvel at the time or Eclipse and see what Don McGregor was doing over there with Sabar. They had all these alternate titles *Star Reach* was putting out Frank Brunner, Dick Giordano penciled and inked the story, it was just stuff you didn't normally see. I felt as if these were the only companies that were growing up as fast as I am. When I got back into comics again it was probably 87'-88' a company called Malibu, it was Eternity, Malibu.

That was one one the questions I actually had.

Ok, I won't say anymore...

No, no that's going right into it. So did you walk in the door at Malibu and get the Ex-Mutants?

No, what happened was that somebody, oh... OK, I did an illustration for a science fiction book. I can't remember who the author is, but he is pretty popular, and I did all the illustrations for the inside of this book. That author thought, "Oh, he's terrific". He thought he discovered me, I didn't know but he was running around with my samples. Malibu called me up and said they saw what I had done for this guy, I'm embarrassed but I don't know his name, but then again, I can't remember my cousins' names, ok?

Joe Q: You remembered Frank Brunner and Dick Giordano pretty well.

Well, they had a lot of impact on me.

Joe Q: I mean, like, this guy...

Well, uh...

Joe Q: That's kind of sh*tty, if you ask me...

It was a good book. If he ever hears this he's gonna call me up and say, "you sonuva...".

Joe Q: ...speaking of *War of the Worlds*...

Anyway, I think an 18-wheeler full of bowling balls ran him over, so I don't know if he's putting out any more books, but anyway, he brought it to this guy, Brian Marshall at Eternity. Eternity was located in Brooklyn and California. In Brooklyn, they had this house with rubber masks in the window and the whole neighborhood thought that they had serial killers or worse, but they were just comics guys who took over a house and put out comics. They wanted to do a painted book based on my color stuff and I handed in the first page and it was supposed to be this cool guy, exciting character and I handed in a full page of the guy in full color sitting in a diner drinking coffee. And they just looked at it and said, "We don't think it's gonna work out" and I said, "Well, on the next page somebody bursts through a window, but this is the opening page; I was just trying to get a mood," and they said maybe not; we'll try to find something else for you and they offered me this book, *Ninja*, drawn by Kevin Farrel and written by Chris Henderson. Chris is now doing paperbacks, detective books.

Joe Q: You remember those days.

I have to. They live near me. So I did *Ninja* for a few issues and they said how'd you like to do *Ex-Mutants* and I said, "Yeah, yeah, sure," and I was still doing a 9 to 5 job. After a year with them I was doing 2 or 3 books a month, with my 9 to 5 job, getting money that was not the best but then again, I was getting work and getting experience which was more important at the time. The money was spending money, but I learned a lot. I'd show the samples around to a guy like Jim Steranko who I met years later. He sat with me for two hours looking at my stuff, tearing me a new *ssh*le, so to speak, showing me what I'm doing wrong, showing me how to do things better, so I didn't mind the money-thing so much; I had a regular job. If I didn't I'd be you know, shooting up heroin and pulling my teeth out. I used the experience. I inked over Ron Lim, Dusty Abell, who does work for DC. I kept sending samples and getting leads from Marvel and DC and remember, these were the only companies in 1989. Finally, I met up with Tex again. Tex looked at my stuff and said I should be working and asked if I wanted to do *Ghost Rider* for him. that was issues 6 and 15 and Tex was nice enough to give me credit on the books, which background inkers usually don't get. I think I was one of the first...and since my name was long, it was so much bigger then everybody's on the page. That was really funny. I painted a cover with Tex, it was #13, the first Ghost Rider painted cover, which we snuck in at the last minute, so they had no choice but to use it. An editor up there, Don Daly, saw how hard I was working and decided to give me a break and the first two books I did were The Punisher in *The 'Nam* 52 and 53, which sold a lot of copies for *The 'Nam*, not because of my work, but because the Punisher was in it. From there, I just did a lot of stuff and I practically hit every Marvel title in the past couple of years, but now I'm just putting out a little bit because...things change.

Ok, we'll come back to Marvel, but let's get to Joe.

Jim: Oh, Joe's here!?!

Now, you're how old?

Joe Q: Me? I'm 31.

Single?

Joe Q: Bigamist.

Schooling?

Joe Q: Yes.

Heard something interesting about you: are you a member of Mensa?

Joe Q: ah...yes. No, I'm not a member of Mensa. Circumcised, yes, but not a member of Mensa. I don't know where you heard that, but I will take credit for that.

It's a great rumor.

Joe Q: It is a good rumor, actually, let's spread that: I'm a member of Mensa.

In fact...he, uh...he RUNS Mensa...

Joe Q: Yeah, in fact, I, ah...inVENted Mensa. Yeah, that's it...Me and Morgan Fairchild...

Whom he's seen naked...

Joe Q: On a boat...that I own...

Jim: ...called Mensa.

Joe Q: ...called Mensa. That I designed...

Now, you started out at Valiant?

Joe Q: Yes.

As a colorist.

Joe Q: As a colorist.

Which books can I dust off to see your stuff, like Mario *or* Zelda*?*

Joe Q: A lot of the stuff that I colored, I didn't even get credit for because it was done by committee. I might do a page here; there was a formula to coloring back then where they had certain people that would color just the characters , certain people would color just the backgrounds, certain people to clean your brush, I don't know...it was like everything, you know.

(Jimmy cuts in) I'm looking for someone to clean my brushes, by the way...

There are a lot of people who'd be willing to do it for you now. So, you worked under Jim (Shooter)?

Joe Q: Yes, I worked under Jim, but I never had any dealings with Jim directly as a colorist.

He's been taking a lot of heat lately with the jump to Defiant, especially in CBG.

Joe Q: Yeah, right.

It's kinda like throwing knives. Got any feelings on it?

Joe Q: I stay out of it. It all comes second-hand to me. Everybody's got their own opinions. I did read the press release and there were several things involved here: number one, yes, most people pad their resume but number two, it was a resume that went out to the media and it seems that whoever did that press release should've known a little bit better. It was a little bit harsh, I mean, if I had been one of the people on the receiving end, involved way, way back in the creation of certain events, I might've been ticked.

Do you think they're coming down too hard on him?

Joe Q.: I don't know. You have to understand that with my knowledge of the history of comic books, I'm slowly but surely learning the artistic history of it. I have many people telling beating an education into me, but my knowledge of the politics of comic books is nil. Everything I have is second-hand knowledge.

You're a big Miller fan, right?

Joe Q: Absolutely.

Was it the narrative style or the physical technique?

Joe Q: It was everything, really. I mean, Frank is such a good looking guy...anytime, you know? I would have to say in the beginning, it was the narrative. Just the way he told a story; the pacing, everything involved was absolutely metaphysical.

When we talk about technique, is there a particular style or brush or a certain tool that you use more often...

Joe Q: Yeah, but I can't tell ya...

Yeah (all laughing). That really came out wrong...

Joe Q: ...When the moon is right at certain times at night...*(Jimmy rolls off a Roy Orbison growl)* I use a very hard lead. I use a 4H in a 3 millimeter mechanical pencil. I'm a real anal-retentive kind of guy and I just like to keep the page clean and stuff, so I pencil really, really, really tight. I find that 4H lead doesn't smear across the page as much.

Speaking of technique, both of you, are you right-handed or left-handed?

Joe Q: Um...(laughs) I'm right-handed.

Jim: Same thing.

Joe Q: But sometimes I use the left so it feels like a stranger, if you know what mean.

Well...a question...

Joe Q: ...But I don't use his left...

A question for both of you...

Joe Q: ...callused...

If I could change my style, I'd want to be_____"

Jim: Al Williamson, or Frank Frazetta. One of those two.

Joe Q: Nowadays, I'd either want to be someone as tight as Kevin Nowlan or somebody who could just go nuts like Sienkiewicz. I mean, I fall somewhere in between there, stylistically, artistically-speaking. Narrative-wise, I'd love to do what Frank Miller does. I'd like to do like Alan Moore does, I mean, those guys are just unbelievable. You know, if I could be anyone or I could change my occupation, I'd like to be able to write...but I'm too afraid to.

Why?

I'd like to be Bill Sienkiewicz, actually, now that you mention it. I love Bill's stuff. I wouldn't mind being Frazetta. Actually, I wouldn't mind being Sting...

Jim: If you were Sting...actually, you'd like to be Mickey Roarke.

Joe Q: -Tom Jones. Tom Jones is definitely good.

Here's a novice question for you guys. When you look over a new project, how do you negotiate pricing? Do you have a rep who does that for you?

Jim: We have an 800 lb. guy named Vinny. He has a broken nose, but he can speak like this: (doing Brando as the godfather), "I wanna tell you somethin'. Palmiotti and Quesada? Ya gotta have the money up front, ok?".

So, if a kid walked up to you and asked...well, let's take this straight from America Online. Neophyte14 asks...

Joe and Jim: Hey, Neo!

Jim: That's NEO, not NEIL.

Joe: Not Neil?

Jim: NEO, NEO...

Anyway, he asks this question: Is it a good idea to publish your own book when you have no experience but don't expect to make much money, if any, or is it better to keep bugging Marvel or DC and go after some loser title? Would either of you work on a title that you hate if the money was right?

Jim: No. I'd never work on a project that I hate. When I started, I was so darn enthusiastic, I'd do anything that I got--a terrible book, but I didn't know how terrible it was. I look back on it now and if they offered it to me, I wouldn't do it because *(chuckle)* I have a little knowledge behind me. But in a case like he's describing, if you can't break in Marvel, if you're really beating your head against a wall, it's not a bad idea to self-publish especially if you don't expect to make money. If you're expecting to make money, then you're deluding yourself at that point. Marvel will look at samples, but if you did publish your own thing and put a lot of work into it and proud of it, it's really nice to hand in a package...

Joe Q: It also shows a certain amount of incentive. Sometimes when an freelancer comes into Marvel, even if he has samples that are relatively acceptable and just about ready to make it, the major concern is...(pause) I don't know about Marvel these days, they're putting out a lot of product. When I started two years ago, I heard freelancers telling me that the business is radically different from two years before I started and now it's incredibly different from the year that I started. Back when I started, they probably wouldn't put you on a monthly right away. The main concern is whether (you) can deliver a monthly book. If you're putting out your own magazine, that shows a certain amount of incentive and a certain amount of drive that says "this guy really wants it."

Jimmy, when you were starting out, were you up against certain obstacles that somebody new to the field -a tenderfoot- could avoid when they walk in the front door?

Jim: When I started out, it was a little different. You showed a dozen different samples to a dozen different editors and hoped you get picked.

Joe Q: It was a really closed shop.

Jim: Now if you floor somebody , they'll pull you right in. You know...*(pause)* What was the question again?

Were there certain obstacles?

Joe Q: He used to walk in naked.

Jim: I used to walk in buck naked. If it was a female editor, I got the job. If it was a male editor, I had some problems with him. Basically, you have to sell yourself. I had a lot of experience in advertising and can b*llsh*t--can I say b*llsh*t?--my way around and be very accommodating; you have to know how to push and pull. If you come off on somebody with "I can do anything, I can do it cheap," that doesn't accomplish anything. We people who hire don't want someone who is really hungry. We may think we do, but we really want the people who are very secure with themselves on the job, unless I have a sweat shop.

One of the biggest bitches I have in that is hearing people say, "Oh yeah, I did the pencilling, the inking, the lettering and all I got was $25 a page", and I can't help but feel that they're hurting the industry more then serving it.

Jim: Well, I think as long as it's independents, just do the job and get it done. If you're happy, fine. Again, you're not going to make that much money. If you're looking to make money, I'd say stick to what you do best. Hang with your strength and show what you know and stick to that. If you're good enough, eventually you'll get a chance to show all that you know.

A lot of people think of comics as an end-all, lifetime goal; that you don't need anything else. Now that you've "arrived", what does the industry look like from the inside? Do you get respect from your peers?

Jim: Well, I've "arrived" for whatever that means; I guess people know my name. There's always people who want something from you, but I have a pretty good instinct for meeting people.

So, in other words, you wouldn't hold it against me if I handed you a resume?

Jim: No, not at all. If some guy hands me samples and I feel that this guy is really good, I look at them. I have people that I use; I hand-pick them. I have background inkers that I only use on certain things. I really don't use people on everything I do, I'm very picky about stuff, but these guys are God, they're really good and...what happens is within 6 months they're doing their own books, pursuing their own

careers. Ken Branch, who's a friend of mine, is a perfect example. He's such a hard worker and we both started at the same time, it just happened that I was a little luckier then Ken and I'm very aggressive at what I want. It helps to be aggressive in a good way; I can dance the dance and what I did was use Ken as much as I could and (he) learned how I hold myself with people. Ken is now inking *Doctor Mirage*, which is a great book, and is inking for DC. I don't want to say I'm his father-figure, but nothing could make me prouder then to have a guy ink for me and become another hot inker. It pays to be humble. You can tell hard work from a mile away. You can't take the stand "that's my competition". If you do that, you're a complete idiot. You try to take the best of each guy. Again, watching them work, the silliest little thing they might do...all of a sudden you might go, "Wow, I never really thought about that...Hm, a light box...Look at that penpoint...That's a new way of looking at something." If Al Williamson said to come to his house and sharpen pencils and dust off books for the afternoon and sit with him for an hour, yeah, I'd drive up there in a minute. The fun thing about this industry is that you can pick certain people and keep watching them get better. I'd say Joe's definitely one of them. It's like,what's he going to be like five years from now?

Speaking of that, where do you both think you'll be in five years? Ten years from now?

Jim: The next Kid n' Play.

Do you think you'll stay in comics or possibly make the jump to multi-media?

Joe: I don't think I'll be in comics my whole life. I don't know, I can't predict if I'll be alive. I hope that eventually somewhere down the line I can get into writing something. I feel like I could do it, I just don't want to attempt it now because I'm still learning how to draw.

I think you kinda have it down.

Joe: There are guys who have it down and are incredible story-tellers and there's a potential that has to be reached...there's a lot of ground to be broken there. Frank did it with *Dark Knight*, Alan Moore did it with *Watchmen* and other things in between that are just as good. There's more of that stuff waiting to be done. I used to use the analogy that *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* were like the *Sgt. Pepper* and White Album of our industry, so there's still room for someone to do their *Tommy* or...

Jim: Debbie Gibson...

Joe: Debbie Gibson...ah...

Jim: Samantha Fox...

Speaking of Dark Knight, you're a big Batman fan.

Joe: Right.

How did you pull into the "big event"?

Joe: It started a long time ago when I started at DC. I'd go around the office and at that time the Andy Helfer was the editor of *Legends[of the Dark Knight]*, which had just kicked up. This was at the old offices and Denny was still around and I would walk up to Denny's assistant, Kevin Dooley at the time, I'd walk up to them, literally, and say, "You know, I would give you my left testicle to draw Batman"...

Jim: That why you walk like that?

Joe: Yeah. I lost it...well, they would giggle and say "Yeah, yeah, yeah" and then one day Denny finally gave me the call and gave me several pages in the *Legends of the Dark Knight* Annual. After that, he talked to me about doing the *Azrael* project. That was about a year and a half ago. I said, "What is it with this Azrael guy? Why would I want to do this mini-series when Batman, the character I love so much, hardly appears in it? Then he explained to me that they were plans were to do this big Batman project where they'd lose Batman for a while, but they didn't know they were going to do it, but they knew they needed somebody to replace him, so we created Azrael. Denny did the brain portion of Azrael and I did the physical portion of Azrael and that's how it all got started. Part of the project was that I would design the new Batman costume when that time came around and it's really unfortunate because Denny had offered me Batman on a regular basis literally the day after I had accepted the *X-Factor* job. I committed to one thing and that's where I stayed.

But things changed again. What's happened with Marvel?

I'm off *X-Factor* now. I'm off the book.

Was it a comfortable departure?

It was comfortable; it was expected. The way this industry is going right now, it's really difficult to keep guys on monthly books. There's a lot of stuff out there and it's not strictly the money. I've been offered projects that pay infinitely better then the projects that I'm working on now, not that what I'm doing now doesn't pay well, but Image is pouring money at guys. So is Dark Horse. It's like showing big dollar signs, but there were an awful lot of books that were paying better and they were actually very good books and good characters. This is why when you asked me if I'd do something that I hate, the answer is no. So, these things kept coming to me over my answering machine and the situation is, in the industry, that these are the really good times and they may last a month, they may last a year,

they may last five years but a lot of us are betting on the short term right now.

So you're honestly looking at comics as a short-term goal?

Exactly. Like I said, my next two projects are for Valiant and I've discussed some things with DC, but we'll see what happens.

This question is from Mike on Prodigy, (KJCT38C) and he's asking Jimmy to list his work and when it's due out.

Ok, up and coming: two books for World's Greatest Universe from Dark Horse, *Titan* over Brian Anthrop. He's a new guy and he's TERRIFIC! -the guy's got this Simon/Shuster look over *Titan*. And the other one's *King Tiger* over Paul Chadwick and that's like one of the last books on that line. Also, I'm doing *Solo* regular.

Joe: Solo regular?

Jim: And it hurts. I'll be doing *Judge Dredd* for DC, a project for Valiant that I don't know if I can say much about, and of course, *Punisher 2099*. Seems like I'm doing a lot. People ask me how I can do four books a month, but you have got to remember that some of it was done three months ago. I've had months where I've had six books out and people look at me like I'm nuts.

They forget that you stagger them across, pardon the pun, X-amount of time.

Well, my thing is that I have a big map of every project that I do. I take the book, I do it, I go on to the next thing I have to do and that's how I really work.

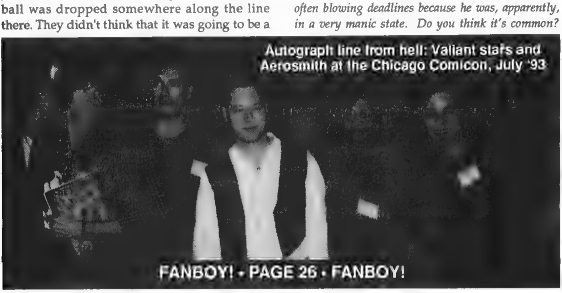
Let me rap two online questions together for you. One's from D. Thor (JTW43A) asking bout you work on The Ray *and why it's not a regular series and one from Penny Blue form America Online: Our library, which I work for, stocks current comics. I loved* The Ray *from moment one. Do you see your work alongside classic literature and if not, why not?*

Joe: Ok, well, as far as *The Ray* is concerned the ball was dropped somewhere along the line there. They didn't think that it was going to be a really successful character, so when that book originally came out, people thought it was an Impact book and it almost died a very quick death, but it started to catch on by word of mouth. It seems funny, but I really think that it's been selling better in he past couple of months strictly by word of mouth, so the back issues have been moving quite a lot.

It was a very obscure title. I remember picking up that first one and thinking, I don't know who this artist is, but boy, it looks good.

Joe: It's your classic superhero name: THE RAY. It was one of my favorite, favorite, favorite projects. We reinvented a character and he wasn't gritty, he wasn't nasty, he wasn't a criminal and he didn't have a dark past, it was really just going back to comics the way they used to be. As far as plans for him, I've heard nothing. They were supposed to do a new series which I was to do the covers for, time permitting. They were supposed to release the book as a trade paperback and it hasn't happened. He's in the Justice League now and I don't know what they're doing with him...I miss that character a lot.

This brings me to a question that is very personal. A common trait that I see in so many, many people who do comics is that they are very withdrawn, even in the presence of a lot of friends or family. Depression or withdrawal are very prevalent, along with divorce and detachment where you'd think that they'd be riding pretty high. I can understand a lot of people who are struggling just making ends meet. They're doing ok one week and ready to lose their apartments the next because of how fickle this industry is. When I started out, I met a very successful syndicated cartoonist who was a very heavy drinker and was very lonely despite her overwhelming popularity. Some years before that, I met a well-respected silver-ager who was often so depressed that he couldn't get up or get dressed beyond a bathrobe, often blowing deadlines because he was, apparently, in a very manic state. Do you think it's common?



Do you think it's a side-effect of creativity? Is it a lingering angst from hungrier days when the money was rotten? Is it, maybe, because they didn't get the respect they felt they deserved?

Joe: You know, it's really funny. I don't think that this is solely a problem of the comics industry, I think it's a problem of the entertainment industry. I come from different segments of it, [being an artist] as well as a musician. I know people who are in the acting profession and it's a rough road. It's a very solitary thing. When you're rejected, you can't help but take it on a personal level. Even when you get the work and it's not well received, I've sat next to guys with lines of kids waiting to sign their books and here I sat waiting with one kid. You can't help but feel a little slighted, you know? And also, your work environment,: unless you work in a studio...I'm a very solitary person. I work at home by myself. I sit at a table 8, 10 hours a day. I don't even turn on a tv. I might have some music playing, but I sit there and WORK and it's lonely. It's an incredibly lonely thing to do. A few of us are able to get our head above it. Thank God, I have a social life.

Do you know when to stop? Do you know when you're starting to sink or when you're starting to burn out?

Joe: I know when I'm starting to sink, but unfortunately, in the past months, I've been so booked that I couldn't stop; I had no choice, so you tie yourself down and work. Jimmy saw me go through hell a few months ago. I was doing three books and all of them were double-sized things. Luckily, we have a social life to fall back on. We have friends and we have families and all that sort of stuff where a lot of guys in this industry don't have that. I'm amazed that they can keep their sanity, because they do what I do and they keep doing it. I think a lot of them find solace in their work and when it's all said and done, yeah, I think depression is very prevalent.

...And it causes a lot of burn-out, too, I think.

Joe: A lot of burn-out.

Jim: Realistically, you do need a life outside your work and although you say that your life is your work, you really do need to take breaks. You need to go out, you need to smell the air, even if it is New York. A lot of people try to knock their problems away by burying themselves with work, with movies, with anything, whatever it may be. My social life is more important because my family life, my mom, my girlfriend or whatever it may be is the most important thing. I'm no fool. I know when Joe and I hang out, it's like stress relief. We go out, we'll party, we'll go nuts and then we'll get back to work.

That's what I meant by a posse. I meant you keep some people around who can help you when you're feeling burned-out and...

Jim: We hang with Nelson; Nelson's a party in himself. Nelson DeCastro the painter; he's something, boy...

Joe: I agree with Jimmy. Outside of my family and my girlfriend, there are very few people outside of this industry that I can talk to...on a social level outside of comic books, because in comic books we can talk to anybody. Jimmy and I are late-bloomers in this industry. We worked a lot of crappy jobs. I talked to John Romita, Jr. this morning and I said very few guys in this business have ever worked a job where someone says, "dig up that dirt and you put it in that box over there".

Jim: Having worked in an agency, I had art directors tell me that I had to buy this and that; stressful things. A lot of stress.

I think that gives you a better edge, don't you? You learn to survive out there outside of this stuff.

Jim: It gives you an edge, but Joe and I are at a period where we can lay back a little bit and have less stress. There's no reason to have such stress...

Joe: Then why do I have so much?

Jim: 'Cause we enjoy what we're doing, basically, but again, I always say you need to take four vacations a year. I walk my talk; I do it. At least four times a year, if not five or six. People ask me how I do that and I just know how to monitor my time; this is when I work, this is when I play, this is when...realize what's real and what's not. Look, you can do four billion books, but when you walk into the real world, who really gives a crap. You've got to realize that this is not your whole life.

parting shots: paparazzi

1) Scream-queen Monique Gabriel strikes a cool pose as she signs autographs at the Chicago Comic-Con. Sizably attractive, her get-up really sizzles and beats the hot August heat.

2) Arm-in-arm, a few friendly buddies from the Comico crowd. Smile for the birdie!

3) Archie's bunch are all smile as they pen some autographs for their fans. Archie Comics, who have been around for the past 50 years, are publishing an all new comic called Conservation Corps. Best of luck, fellas...

4) Colorist on Plasm: The one and only Marcus David focuses in the limelight for a photograph.

5) The legendary Neal Adams talks tips in Chicago.

6) Adorned in the usual fashion, Mr. T sports "golden silverware" from one of the many braided chains around his (where is it?) neck. His appearance promotes the premiere of his **Mr. T** comic book, which is beginning to take off. We pity the fools who pass this one up!

7) Who would have ever thought Aerosmith's Steven Tyler was a #1 comic book fan? Steve made the rounds sporting a **Shaman's Tears** feather at the O'Hare Expo Center and took some time to meet with fans for some exclusive photographs. Such a nice guy!

❤ *-Chrystal MonAmour*

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